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ABSTRACT

This paper considers political reasoning within a democracy and how mass media as, affect that process, as well as how the perspective and method of critical thinking may be brought to bear on the subject of media and politics. Specifically, the paper (1) discusses some ways in which the mass media may affect political reasoning; (2) offers a critique of mass media and journalism in the contemporary political process, including comments on political advertising; and (3) considers some classroom strategies based on critical thinking for approaching the subject. Arguing that the media are best studied and understood as constituting an ecological system that has everything to do with the shape of an individual's interior world, the paper first presents a critique of the media, focusing on media bias and making a case for the media's habit of "paying more attention to fluff than substance." The paper then discusses political advertising, especially the "negative advertising" so often practiced in political commercials on television. Noting the need for those who follow the media on politics to "think reflectively," the paper concludes by offering nine class exercises that should help in thinking critically, including: keeping a media log; studying the agenda setting function of media; demonstrating the corporate nature of today's media; demonstrating what sources of authority are cited in news stories; and demonstrating how media "represent" social reality. (NKA)

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ED 398 612

"Do the Media Undermine Democracy?"

16th International Conference
on Critical Thinking and Educational Reform
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by
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I assume that everyone here to some degree or another is interested in political reasoning within a democracy and how mass media may affect that process. I also assume that we're interested in how the perspective and method of critical thinking may be brought to bear on the subject of media and politics.

May I test my assumptions?

How many teach about politics to some degree or another?

How many treat media in the classroom?

Finally, how many combine study of both media and politics to some degree or another?

Finally, How many are K-12?

-------college or university?

CS509306

My plan today is to do three things: (1) discuss some ways in which I think mass media may affect political reasoning; (2) offer a critique of mass media and journalism in the contemporary political

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process, including some comments on political advertising; and (3) consider some classroom strategies based on critical thinking for approaching the subject.

Throughout, I welcome your questions, comments and rejoinders. In particular, toward the end of the session, I'll make time available so that we can share classroom strategies and tactics--but feel free to jump in whenever you have something to contribute.

II. MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

A. Expectations: Democratic political theory, at least as I was taught such theory beginning with civics classes in high school all the way through graduate school, had a lot to say about the relationship of the press (which I'll use synonmously with "the media") to our political lives.

What are some tenets of democratic theory that have to do with the media?

- --The press has been called the Fourth branch of govt. (the informal adjunct to the executive, judicial and legislative)
- --The marketplace of ideas concept; ---
- ---only agency capable of protecting us from the state's abuses of power; we call this the watchdog function

Indeed, journalists see themselves as "the last thin line between ordinary Americans and the calculated deception of the powers that be in government and commerce." [Richard Reeves column 7-25-96]

To sum up expectations for press/media/journalism--- ACCORDING TO THEORY, ***DEMOCRACY CAN'T THRIVE, LET ALONE SURVIVE, WITHOUT AN INFORMED CITIZENRY AND IT IS A FREE PRESS THAT MAKES THIS POSSIBLE.*** In this regard, those who founded the republic expected the press to be the institutional agency for critical thinking in the society.

III. A CRITIQUE OF MEDIA

Obviously, AS YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE SUSPECTED, if I thought the media lived up to these expectations, I wouldn't have proposed this workshop. So let me begin with my critique of the media, its performance in the realm of politics, and its effects on political reasoning.

I think the very *first* thing that it is useful to understand is that contemporary media constitute a highly interactive, seemingly seamless ecological system of sorts, except that this system operates at the level of ideas and feelings rather than in the physical universe. What I mean by this is that the lines between information media and journalism, advertising and marketing, and entertainment media and the popular arts are increasingly indistinct.

As a result, I'm not always certain where my students--or for that matter, the rest of us--get the

understandings they have. For instance, many of my students would be hard pressed to say how they know what they know about the JFK assassination. Did their sense of this event come to them through journalism, history books, or Oliver Stone's Movie, "JFK." Similarly, I have had some students cite "Geraldo" or "The Larry King Show" as a source of a political belief with the same gravity that they cite the New York Times.

In this regard, we would do well to remember that in one study nearly 50% of those watching so-called "reality television" or "crime recreation" shows ("Rescue 911") felt they were watching the real thing even when there was a clear statement at the bottom of the TV screen that the scene was a reenactment or re-creation.

Incidentally, I think people can be forgiven their confusion, at least some of the time, given situations such as the one involving Joe Kline, recently revealed author of "Primary Colors," the thinly disguised political novel about the Clintons. Or what about the book "Unlimited Access" by a former White House security agent, Gary Aldrich, that is a mixture of gossip and wholesale fabrication, so much so that not even the GOP dominated House committee investigating "Filegate" considered Aldrich reputable enough to subpoena. Even George Will, who is no friend to the Clintons, was moved to comment that the book did not meet any test of reliable journalism of which he was aware.

Yet Aldrich is invited on to "This Week With David Brinkley" on ABC and his book got widespread attention in serious newspapers from The Washington Post to the New York Times.

My point is that any useful approach to the media and politics must take into account this ecological system, which has been made possible by a powerful combination of modern technology and marketing practices. This system is historically unprecedented in its reach and scope, including its function as a source of political belief and knowledge. I think it's safe to say that most people are unable to remember how exactly they came to know things, and this is especially so in what has been called a "message rich" society--one in which our sense of the political may come to us as much from MTV, *info-mercials* , talkshows, *docudramas*, films, popular music, political advertisements, and novels as it does from newspapers, news magazines, National Public Radio, or the Jim Lerher News Hour.

Perhaps the most commonly heard complaint about the media in the political arena involves the problem of bias. For instance, I've heard many of my friends who identify themselves as Democrats argue that the press made so much of the Aldrich book because journalists work for politically conservative news organizations who will go to any length to embarrass the President and prevent his re-election. I've heard similar arguments made about Bob Woodward's new book, *The Choice*, and the widespread journalistic attention that has been paid Woodward's revelation that Hillary Rodham Clinton has had conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt.

But if the Clinton's have reason to be displeased with the press, what are we to make of Bob Dole's attack on Katy Couric of

NBC when she raised questions about his connections to the tobacco lobby, or Newt Gingrich's assertion that his mother was set up by Connie Chung when mom related how Newt really felt about Hillary, or George Bush's complaints about the media and the "Wimp Factor," not to mention Dan Quayle's earnest belief that the media had made him into a poster boy for the world's dull normals.

For the record, I happen to think there is *political* bias in the American mainstream media and that it is a conservative bias but that (1) such bias is most clearly seen where social issues or policies are concerned, not political candidates; and (2) that such bias is more *establishmentarian* than it is narrowly partisan. For instance, I think the great news organizations of our time do, indeed, tend to frame issues in such a way that portray challenges to the established order as unwise or dangerous or both, and that they tend to side with other powerful sectors of society when such challenges arise. That is not the same thing as saying they willfully see to it that journalists or other workers in their employ, say, slant the news for or against a given candidate.

For instance, where law and order issues are concerned, or social welfare, or national defense, or taxation, I think it is possible to demonstrate certain kinds of biases in news coverage (as opposed to editorial comment--it's not fair to criticize the media for bias in its editorial commentary, which after all is supposed to include a point of view.)

But even here the political bias of which I speak is far more subtle--and unconscious on the part of journalists--than is commonly assumed.

It is a bias born of the corporate identity and nature of modern media; of the fact that media in any society tend to reflect the status quo assumptions of that society--NOT its radical margins; that media follow certain professional routines which tend to favor established authority rather than those who challenge it.

I think it overly simplistic to encourage students in the belief that partisan bias is the only sort of bias at work in the media, which I've come to conclude all too many teachers do.

Probably even more important to consider, at least from my perspective, is a second kind of bias. This is the commercial bias that pervades American media and which I think is as much of a danger, particularly during election campaigns, than the narrowly partisan kind. I think we must make every effort to show our students how commercial bias may be a factor in the media's approach to the political world, if for no other reason than that such bias usually is far less obvious than unreasoned political prejudice--and therefore much more insidious.

As many of you will know, one of the founding parents of the critical thinking movement was John Dewey. Dewey was interested in the possibilities of what we have come to call "critical thinking" precisely because of the promise such a perspective and method held for achieving and preserving democracy. In other words, his concerns were as much political as they were pedagogical.

So far as I know, Dewey didn't use the label "critical thinking" for the direction he'd like to see education take; rather, he preferred the term "reflective thinking." And he once argued that such reflective thinking comprises the 'vital habits' of democracy--which he said were the ability to follow an argument, grasp the point of view of another, debate the alternative purposes that might be pursued."

I like that phrase, the "vital habits of democracy" and I like the concept of *reflective thinking* And it is my argument today that neither are served by the commercial imperative that drives media today. Instead what media encourage is reflexive thinking.

Question for Audience: What are some differences between

Reflective and Reflexive

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Thinking that is automatic, unconsidered, a rush to judgment, probably based on stereotypes or is stereotype-reinforcing, cliché-ridden; in other words, it is the opposite in all ways to REFLECTIVE THINKING --and I think democracy is much the poorer as a result.

* * * * * * * * *

How do media discourage reflective thinking largely as a result of wanting to keep costs low and profits high? Let me count the ways, most of which begin from the assumption of media managers that the rest of us are only interested and will attend to scandal, conflict, high drama, sensationalism, titillation, whatever. THIS IS THE SINGLE-MOST DISASTROUS ASSUMPTION for political discourse that I can identify in American journalism.

In the interests of full disclosure, I got the idea for the title of this workshop from a very well publicized book that came out late last year: Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy by James Fallows, Washington Editor of *Atlantic Monthly*.

His book is as good an introduction as any I know of to the problems I'm discussing--and I've got the full citation on a bibliography that I've had duplicated. If you'd like a copy, they'll be here after the session.

Here's what Fallows has to say in his introduction:

> ...[the media] "have played a surprisingly important and destructive role" [in undermining public confidence in politics.]. [Far] from making it easier to cope with public challenges, the media often make it harder. By choosing to present public life as a contest among scheming political leaders, all of whom the public should view with suspicion, the news media help bring about that very result." p. 7

What both Fallows and I are worried about is not the same thing as the common complaint about the media failing to give us "Good News." Journalism is not in the "Good News" business any more than is medicine. You don't want your doctor to tell you only what's right with you, and I don't think that's the job of journalists, either. It is essential a citizen to know what's wrong with the body politick every bit as much as you or I need to know if we have a serious illness, else how can we begin treatment.

That said, the kind of "bad political news" we get in today's media is far more likely to be that which--in Fallows terms--is "Easy, Convenient, and Cheap." In this regard, just as with non-political news, disasters make up a disproportionate share of news we get about government or those who participate in government.

Why? According to Fallows, the obvious reason is that disasters are interesting to look at. But covering disasters is also easy and cheap. You send out a crew, you point the camera at whatever has blown up, and the story tells itself.

In a slightly different way the nightly 'standups' from TV correspondents are also there because they're easy. Similarly, charges and counter-charges are easy to cover; similarly, mud-slinging is easy to cover.

The problem is that when it comes to making sense out of our political world, the easily covered event, or the scandalous event, or even the disastrous event probably are not what it is most significant to know. For instance, where were journalistic warnings about the savings and loan tragedy that might have saved us half a trillion dollars; we got virtually none until long after the damage had been done. Yet the Congressional Check Cashing scandal, which involved no public funds, got saturation coverage. It was easy to cover, while the savings and loan debacle was not.

Or take the case of Admiral Jeremy Boorda, the Navy's top ranking officer who killed himself in May when Newsweek began investigating the possibility that a year earlier he had worn a Vietnam combat ribbon to which he might not be entitled. The interesting thing here is that the first serious journalistic attention Adm. Boorda received in his career was the occasion of his suicide, whereas when he ordered the first NATO air strikes ever on Bosnia months before, his actions went virtually unremarked in the press: no profiles, no commentaries, no lengthy looks into his competence to make such a decision.

For those who doubt the case to be made about news media paying more attention to fluff than substance, Fallows asks us to consider that by his count, of the nearly 500 stories that *60 Minutes* aired between 1990 and 1994, more than one-third were celebrity profiles, entertainment-industry stories, or exposes of what David Halberstam has called 'petty scandals." Barely one-fifth of the stories concerned economics, the real workings of politics, or any other issue of long-term national significance. Except for a flurry of stories after the Rodney King episode in Los Angeles, 60 minutes averaged only one program per year touching on the effects of race in America." p. 57

And it isn't just broadcasting that is in pursuit of maximized profit. Even the last bastions of journalism, the family-owned newspapers, are giving way to bottom-line journalism, witness the L.A. Times. According to Fallows, in 1995 the Times Mirror Company, parent of Los Angeles Times and Newsday, appointed as its CEO Mark H. Willes, whom it brought in from General Mills. Willes, who had no experience whatsoever in news business, said that the same techniques he had used in marketing foods would be useful in newspaper management. He said that newspapers must "refresh" their product offerings, much as General Mills had revamped its lines of food. Asked for examples of what he meant, he cited the successful marketing of cereals, Hamburger Helper and cake mixes," according to the New York Times reporter who interviewed him.

Since his coming on board, there have been significant downsizings: at LA Times, and Newsday's New York newspaper has closed.

My point here is that the media's commercial imperative sets the media agenda, and therefore the agenda for public discussion, rather than a concern for what it is useful for citizens to know at a time in which our cities are in despair, our environment is under assault, we have a crisis of governance, and far too many people are at each other's throats. For instance, Fallows asks, why is "so much of the news, in print and broadcast alike, about the operational strategy of politics rather than the substance of issues? In other words, about the horse race aspects of politics, who's winning, who's not. In part, it's because reporters like the gamesmanship of politics, but it is more likely the case that the easiest subject for them to discuss is political tactics. Saying whether a new Medicare proposal makes sense or not requires learning something about budgets and health care. Saying whether it helps or hurts Bob Dole can be done off the top of the head.

Fallows gives a wonderful case study of how this works. Fallows cites example of Jan. 24, 1995 state of the union address, by Clinton. Remember, this was to the first Congress to be controlled by Republicans since 1954.

The speech was anything but short and snappy; 1 hour 20 min. immediately, instant analysis began. Peggy Noonan, former Reagan speechwriter, on NBC: Grimaced and groaned; other commentators mentioned congressmen had been slipping out of the capitol bldg.

before speech ended; once more Clinton had failed to stick to agenda; speech would not give President the new start he wanted. Fallows says the comments were virtually all about the tactics of the speech, and they were virtually all thumbs down.

Newspaper columns echoed these sentiments. Even more critical. On Jan. 26, Wash. Post op-ed page consisted mainly of stories about speech, all of which were witheringly harsh. "All Mush and No Message" was headline on Richard Cohen's column; "An Opportunity Missed" over David Broder's piece. Both twitted Clinton for lack of self-discipline, and Cohan wrote: "In an incredible one hour and 20 minutes, he managed to obscure his themes, trample on his rhetorical high spots and weary his audience. Pardon me if I thought of an awful metaphor: Clinton at a buffet table, eating everything in sight."
p. 41.

Funny thing is that an ABC news poll found eight of 10 Americans approved of the speech. CBS News said 74 percent of those surveyed said they had a 'clear idea' of what Clinton stands for, compared with just 41 percent before the speech. A Gallup Poll for USA Today and CNN found that eight in 10 said Clinton was leading country in right direction. Nielsen ratings reported that the longer the speech went on, the more people turned in to watch.

Fallows is not saying that pundits are necessarily wrong and the public necessarily right, just that there is an enormous gulf between the two. "The very aspects of the speech that had seemed

so ridiculous to the professional commentators--its detail, its inclusiveness, the hyper-earnestness of Clinton's conclusion about the "common good" --seemed attractive and valuable to most viewers."

I think the implications for the teacher who's dealing with politics seem clear: We have to tease out larger issues and refuse to play the same game as reporters; must get our students to go beyond the superficial who's ahead syndrome. I'll make a strategy suggestion for how to do this in a few minutes.

At this point, at least for a moment or two, I'd like to go back to a point I made at the beginning of this talk, and that is that media are best studied and understood as constituting an ecological system that has everything to do with the shape of our interior worlds, which is to say the worlds human beings carry around in their heads.

Largely because of television, a hugely important part of these interior political worlds, at least during election campaigns, is the result of political advertising. Another recent book that I would draw your attention to is Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink & Polarize the Electorate. This book also appears on the bibliography that you can get after today's session.

So far as I know, this is the first full scale investigation into the effects of political advertising, particularly negative or hit ads, on political attitudes and behavior using the experimental method.

I think the book is perfectly accessible to the non-political scientist--and least if you don't become intimidated by the tables

and charts. In my case I simply ignored them. (How then do I know they have evidence to back up their claims? I've read a number of reviews of their work by people who do understand such things, and they find nothing wrong with their methodology.)

There were a number of surprising findings in the book, at least for me, but what I was not surprised to learn was that there is hard evidence to support several propositions that I'd long entertained.

According to Going Negative, the American people are divided not along party lines so much as we are "split by a new division: between loyalists and apathetics.

What the book demonstrates is that on the on hand media propaganda can often shore up loyalists to vote for their traditional party; on the other hand, that same propaganda is increasingly peeling off a band of citizens who turn from independence to apathy, even antipathy, toward our political institutions." (particularly if the propaganda is negative.

"The electorate has reacted with frustration and anger. In recent years [to negative political advertising], and the political pulsetakers have registered record lows in political participation, record highs in public cynicism and alienation, and record rates of disapproval of the House of Representatives, the institution designed to represent the public will." p. 3.

According to the study's authors, "The single biggest cause of the new, ugly regime is the proliferation of negative political advertising on tv."

Indeed, they say that their most troubling finding is that negative or "attack" advertising actually suppresses voter turnout.[Furthermore], that "attack advertisements can be, and are, used strategically [precisely] for this purpose." In other words, candidates deliberately use attack ads to suppress the turnout, believing they have a better chance if fewer people vote. [Thus], the real concern for Twenty First Century democracy is not manipulation of naive voters by sophisticated "image makers," but the shrinking of the electorate by political strategists who are fully aware of the consequences of their actions." (p. 9)

The problem is that there are two kinds of independents: Those who are truly independent--they like certain policies of one party and certain policies of the other, but they do not prefer overall ideals of one party to the other. This sort of independent finds political advertising to be "mildly persuasive." p. 81 Second type of independent simply has no interest in politics and even look with suspicion and disgust on governmental activity. "Unfortunately, most independents are largely of the second type. Nationwide survey data show hat a majority of independents follow politics "hardly at all"; and tend to tune out political ads ---unless they are highly negative. Independents of the second variety (say the authors, p. 67) "are largely distrustful of, and alienated from, politics. If they vote at all, it is to throw out one bum or the other. Any message attacking Washington, politics or particular politicians speaks more strongly to the nonpartisan voters' cynicism than do messages detailing what a candidate will do once elected.) p. 67.

So where does all of this leave us. On the one hand we have incredibly sophisticated media technology that can provide us with a 24-hour picture of the world that is as unprecedented as it is unparalleled, while on the other hand we have a political culture that some say is approaching dysfunction. For reasons I've already suggested, I am not at all certain the contradiction is coincidental.

Indeed, I would argue that to think reflectively in such a disordered media world takes particular skills, particular commitment, and a particular perspective that demands something beyond having our students read a daily newspaper, or file a report based on the Jim Lerher News Hour.

At this point, I'll suggest some strategies that have worked in my class on mass media and critical thinking, which I began teaching about ten years ago. I hope you'll also join in and suggest strategies that have worked for you.

1. One of the first exercises I have my students undertake is a MEDIA LOG. For most of them, media is like the air they breathe---they're simply not consciously aware of the time they spend with it. So I have them compile a log of their exposure to media for a week. I hand out a standardized summary form that asks for totals spent with each major medium. This facilitates my figuring out averages, which I then discuss with class--and compare to national usage statistics--which are avilable in any standard media textbook.

II. Problem: To Demonstrate Agenda Setting Function of Media Here I want students to discover for themselves how the news media's agenda may result in a trivialized view of the world AND THE PROBLEM OF INFOTAINMENT; I also want them to experience the process of deciding what is important in their political lives.

- Method: Working groups of three have following tasks: pick two days in previous year at random (or agree to watch same news program); compile list of significant "happenings" for those days from Facts on File; compile list of news section stories for same two days from local newspaper AND a national news magazine; compare lists. Using Facts on File as basis, compile aN ALTERNATIVE news budget that group thinks would have been more useful for our political lives--and defend it. Sometimes I have working groups do brief oral reports to class, sometimes not.

III. Problem: To demonstrate that media can have varying points of view.

- Method: Either pay a visit to a news stand or major bookstore or visit the periodical browsing section of the library where you will find a variety of current magazines on display, or find bound copies in the library, and,

  #1. First look at one of the major weekly news magazines: TIME, NEWSWEEK, OR U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

  #2. Look at one of the periodicals from the Liberal perspective: MOTHER JONES, THE NATION, IN THESE TIMES, MS, NEW REPUBLIC, COMMONWEAL

  #3. Finally look at one of the periodicals from the Conservative perspective: NATIONAL REVIEW, COMMENTARY, CONSERVATIVE DIGEST

  On three separate sheets of paper, please answer the following for each category above:

A. State the name of the periodical in the category

B. Describe the cover page and the tone that is set. What does the Table of Contents tell you about what is on the inside? Describe the format of the publication: illustrations, layout, ads, print size and format. What feelings do you get from the purely visual aspect of the publication?

C. Read at least one article--preferably about the same subject or area of concern--in each publication. In a paragraph or three, how does the language and point of view differ in each? Select a quote to support your judgment.

D. Did you spot a glaring fallacy of the sort we've been discussing or reading about in any or all of the three articles you read? Quote the passage involved and say why it is fallacious reasoning.

IV. Problem: To demonstrate how media are used as source material for political arguments; to encourage argument evaluation; to get students focusing on the reasons people give for the things they believe. (Very successfull exercise)

Most important, My stress in this course on the problem of *UNEARNED OPINION*. When students voice opinion they didn't earn through critical thinking, I think it's a great example of "channeling." And this happens all the time with stuff they get from the media to support their beliefs without having the slightest notion of whether the "facts" are true.

- Method: Individual students track *claims* for one week of family and friends on current HOT political issues that "matter"; it may be necessary to "start arguments"; ask politely how the person making the claims knows that the claim is "true." Record answers, particularly when they involve a news medium as the source. This works particularly well during election campaigns.

V. Problem: To demonstrate corporate nature of today's media; the role that money plays in journalism/media

- Economic Concentration: Problems of simply lecturing about or having students read about economic concentration.

Method #1: Lecture and discuss economic concentration first. Then assign a large (or small) media corporation to each working group. The group must then do some basic research on its corporation.

Of all of the materials that will prove useful to them, I would single out Moody's Industrial Manual. Each entry for a corporation in Moody's includes headings. The ones they should pay attention to are

History Heading--Look for MAJOR acquisitions and pick 6 to 10 of the most significant or largest to discuss; look also for Merger Developments and do the same FOR Joint Ventures, Properties (if important).

Business Heading--Summarize activities; pay particular attention to subsidiaries and count them and describe their range by picking one or two that you think your classmates might recognize.

Consolidated Income Account Heading--This is where numbers come in. Find the column for the most recent year and list Revenues and Net Income. Then find the Consolidated Balance Sheet and at bottom, look for Net Current Assets, which is the total worth of the corporation. In using numbers, be sure you know whether you're dealing with millions or billions.

Students can use various indexes to find other information about a corporation if they wish, but Moody's should have the basics of what they need for their report.

4. Each group's typed report must be handed in to the instructor at the time of the class presentation. It doesn't need to be more than two or so pages, and should summarize the material above.

5. Classroom presentations can involve simple oral reports, charts, whatever. But try to make them interesting. All members of the group ought to participate. Each report should be about 5 minutes long.

VI. Problem: To demonstrate how media "represent" social reality; to demonstrate "frame analysis"

- SEMESTER FOCUS PROJECT: forces students to (1) analyze how media cover something over time and HOW THEY FRAME ISSUES (2) forces students to do some research on an issue which, hopefully, ALSO shows them how superficial news can be.

At the beginning of the semester, I hand out a detailed explanation of this assignment, but in summation, what I want students to do is keep a file of clippings on a given issue (this coming fall semester it will be California Civil Rights Initiative, Prop. 209); and then analyze them using a method called "Frame Analysis." Essentially, all frame analysis is looking at what language is used, what sources of authority are cited; what graphics elements are employed; what aspects receive emphasis; what aspects are left out of the story; and so on. Students must ANNOTATE their clippings (ala Harper's magazine

annotations) using concepts of frame analysis as discussed in class. (*For those of you who have not heard me on this subject before, or who want more info., I've prepared a handout on frame analysis which will be available at end of session.)*

VII. Problem: To demonstrate what sources of authority are cited in news stories; students are encouraged to employ on their samples tests of proper appeal to authority as laid out in informal logic.

- Method: Working Groups; teacher assign different topics to each group (duplicates are o.k., but assign different news sources) that are hot and current. Working group looks at newspapers or tv or newsmagazines for a week or so and *counts* sources on that topic; and in group meeting, categorizes the sources and evaluates the dominant perspective, using sourcing as the sole criteria.

  What do such studies show? One recent survey by a national group, FAIR, discovered that mainstream media turn to conservative and centrist think tanks overwhelmingly for authority. Using NEXUS, a researcher analyzed the number of times in 1995 that 24 major think tanks were quoted in NEXIS, an electronic database that contains the contents of major newspapers and transcripts from prominent radio and tv shows. He discovered that the Heritage Foundation headed the list with 2,268 citations; followed closely by centrist Brookings Institution with 2,192 mentions; American Enterprise Institute, 1,297 and Cato Institute, 1,163. The most quoted progressive think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, ranked 15th on list with 399 citations.

  Authority citations are major framing element in political news; yet study after study shows that sourcing is skewed.

VIII. Problem: To demonstrate *Selective Perception* and its effects on our political reasoning; to suggest to students that they are not unwashed slates.

- Method: World View Family Tree Exercise; *illustrates* where in part our background beliefs come from. Each student try to characterize the beliefs of as many of their forebearers as possible about role of government, taxes, welfare, U.S. role in world, death penalty, (but not about highly personal matters, i.e., religion,), with particular emphasis on what news programs, periodicals, etc. the student was raised with. In this exercise, have student name the last book they received as a gift.

IX. Problem: To get students thinking critically/reflectively about political advertising

- I haven't actually tried this one yet, but I will in fall. Working Groups of three to select one issue (not candidate) and tape video ads or clip newspaper ads. State claims made in ads and analyze them using Frame Analysis method. Then, by either contacting opposing group or finding out material through research, write a narrative counter argument. (One good source of such material might be Ad Watch columns in local paper) This could be done over semester *during* election campaign. Any other ideas about how to do this?